



CAPTivations

Success Stories in Prevention

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Drug Free Mesa County/Build A Generation - (CO)

Many communities realize that adults play a major role in ensuring youth make healthy choices and stay away from alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. Drug Free Mesa County, based in Grand Junction, Colorado, is making sure adults take responsibility by assuming the lead on sponsoring a state-wide keg registration law and seeing to it that laws already on the books are enforced.

Drug Free Mesa County has been earnestly looking at ways to curb excessive teen drinking since an accident on Good Friday 2001. The accident involved seven youth in a sport utility vehicle; one youth died and two were seriously injured. Although the teens in the car had a designated driver, the others were drunk and had not used good judgement – for example, not wearing seat belts – and as a result, several were thrown from the SUV, according to Ruth Michels, co-chairman of Drug Free Mesa County.

"Keg parties have become a rite of spring here," Michels said. "We have a lot of unincorporated area. There are as many as 200 at these parties. They get an adult to buy the beer (in a keg), and then the teens buy a cup for \$5 or \$10 and refill it over and over."

Michels talked to people involved with Texas Standing Tall about their efforts to get a keg registration ordinance passed. The law requires kegs to be marked with identification numbers, and when the keg is purchased, retailers record the keg ID number and the purchaser's name, address, telephone number and driver's license number.

If a keg is confiscated by law enforcement at a party where underage youth have been drinking, the purchaser of the keg can be traced and held accountable. Also, keg ID would help identify those under 21 who try to use false ID's to purchase alcohol.

With the help of Drug Free Mesa County's parent organization, Build A Generation, and underwriting by Farmer's Insurance, Michels' group hosted a statewide meeting in late September, 2001, at Copper Mountain. Michels noted that she was worried she wouldn't get much of a response in the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. However, 65 professionals from law enforcement, criminal justice, policy making, public health and education, as well as elected

officials and parents, attended the day-long session. Participants discussed preparing keg registration legislation, to be introduced to the Colorado legislature in January 2003.

Drug Free Mesa County invited the beverage industry, particularly Coors, which is based in Golden, Colorado, to be a part of the meeting. Michels stated that her research showed that Colorado had attempted to pass a keg registration legislation a number of years ago, but the beer industry had nixed it. She hopes that by getting the beverage industry on board this time, it will support the legislation, and help ensure its passage.

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In the
time
between
now and
when the bill
is introduced
in 2003,
Drug Free

Mesa County and Build A Generation are identifying sympathetic legislators to carry the bill and meeting. They also are meeting with lobbyists of alcohol retailers and wholesalers to get them to co-sponsor the bill and make them part of the process.

Drug Free Mesa County also is setting up a website to educate Colorado residents about keg registration and the consequences of underage drinking. The numbers from SAMHSA are sobering. Colorado has one of the most serious alcohol problems in the US, and adolescents in Colorado drink more than their national counterparts. DUIs in Colorado among those under 18 increased 26 percent between 1997 and 1998.

The work on keg identification seems to be getting noticed.

Earlier this year, Drug Free Mesa County and Build A Generation were invited to a legislative conference hosted by Farmer's Insurance. At that legislative conference, George Tracy received honors for his work on the keg registration legislation.

In the meantime, laws now on the books make it illegal to sell or give alcohol to persons under the age of 21. In the wake of several



recent fatal accidents, Drug Free Mesa County has been working to make sure these laws are upheld, and that the adults who supplied the alcohol that led to these fatal accidents are also held accountable.

The first collision involved a 16-year-old girl who was being charged with vehicular homicide in the deaths of her 18-year-old sister and her 17-year-old friend.

"I read this, and I wondered, where was the adult who supplied the alcohol?" Michels stated. "That person's name should be out there, if only for the public humiliation. So I called the

Grand Junction Daily Sentinel news editor."

The news editor agreed Michels had a good question,

and the two of them asked both the district attorney and the state patrol if they had any names of the adults who supplied the alcohol. Unfortunately, the district attorney had no names, and the state patrol didn't respond.

Two more fatal accidents involving teens driving under the influence of alcohol occurred in Mesa County. The first, in December 2001, a 17-year-old girl who allegedly had a blood alcohol level of 0.219 and marijuana in her system was driving at 105 mph when she tried to make a turn and rolled over into an empty irrigation canal. The accident killed her 22-year-old boyfriend and injured a 21-year-old man. The Daily Sentinel listed the name of the homeowner who had hosted a party for his 18-year-old daughter and 13-year-old son. The homeowner said he had beer for the adults at the party, but denied serving minors.

In the second wreck, a 20-year-old man was allegedly driving drunk when he ran a stop sign, then rolled the car and landed in a ditch. A 17-year-old girl was thrown from the vehicle and killed, and several other passengers received minor injuries. The headline on the

Daily Sentinel article states that the supplier of the alcohol may face charges, a move that prompted a congratulatory letter to the editor from Michels. In both cases, the drivers are facing vehicular homicide and other charges.

Now, Drug Free Mesa County is focusing on getting the message across to adults that they shouldn't be supplying alcohol to minors in conjunction with the annual Country Jam festival. Country Jam is a four-five day event held each summer 20 miles outside of Grand Junction. The event traditionally attracts a large number of underage drinkers, many of whom drink lots of beer because of the warm weather and end up in the first aid tents with alcohol poisoning.

"The sheriff's department got an underage drinking grant and decided to do an awareness campaign, and focus on adults," Michels said.

To kick it off, Build A Generation and Drug Free Mesa County held a breakfast. The Mesa County Sheriff's Department, police chiefs from several local communities, the dean of students from Mesa State College, emergency room doctors, state liquor

inspectors, representatives from the Grand Junction school district, and representatives from local health maintenance organizations attended the breakfast.

From the breakfast came the idea for a poster being displayed in many places. Colorado West Outdoor Advertising has donated billboard space for a year, and The Promised Land, a tabloid paper appealing to the 20- to 30-year-old age group, has offered to promote it. The local high school also has asked to run it, and both the county health department and local liquor stores are displaying it.

The poster depicts twelve beers with the caption, "This package costs \$12.95" and a casket with the caption, "This package costs \$12,950.00." Underneath the pictures is a third caption reading, "Caring adults do not provide alcohol to underage youth."

Local media are paying attention to the issue of underage drinking and the role adults can play in stopping it, Michels said. Local television station KJCT, one of the sponsors of the poster, is running a five-part series on underage drinking, and the high school newspaper is doing a three-part series of articles on the same topic.

Finally, the high school journalism class also is working on a three-page flyer describing symptoms of alcohol poisoning and providing various facts on alcohol, such as how long it takes to metabolize a drink. Michels said if the school board gives the class and Drug Free Mesa County permission, the flyer will be distributed to every parent in the school district.

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Resources:

Center for Substance Abuse Prevention
www.samhsa.gov/centers/csap/csap.html

Decision Support System
www.preventiondss.org

Join Together
www.jointogther.org

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America
www.cadca.org

For this community success story and others from across the Southwest region, visit our website at <http://www.swcapt.org/products/success.html>

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